

Entomological Cabinets

By R. L. E. FORD¹

Now that the craft of making fine entomological cabinets has virtually died out and future craftsmen will be prevented from making more cabinets by the cost, it might be as well to place on record a few details of past manufacturers.

I think without doubt the finest entomological cabinets that were ever produced were those made by Brady, father and son.

The main features which distinguish these beautiful products were:— All mahogany throughout, hidden bearer runners, lifting off frame lids with an extremely narrow frame, and these narrow frames, the thinnest made by anybody, closed down to a tongued and grooved base.

They were so airtight in fact that many think they are difficult to use, as great care is needed when lifting the lids. The camphor cells were concealed in the side of the drawer and closed by a small piece of the 'rail' holding the frame, sliding out. So well did these fit that they were almost invisible. I heard a remark at an auction that 'I didn't go for that cabinet, it has no camphor cells'. A fine investment opportunity lost!

The Bradys flourished around 1900. The cost was then ten shillings a drawer but you could not just go and order a cabinet, Brady worked for love as well. You had to get alongside him and remark that you had dined with a Mr. so and so and saw his wonderful cabinets and wished you were lucky enough to have one like it. All being well Brady might offer to make you one. When my father had one, Brady followed it up with two for birds eggs for one of my uncles, and they are still in the family².

Between the wars, John Jaques of that famous Sports Firm and a micro collector, made in his factory two very fine copies of a Brady cabinet, but these were in two tiers of ten. Using modern machinery they were very fine copies but just distinguishable from those made by the master. These two are now in a museum in the West Country.

Brady was closely followed by Gurney who went to the other extreme by being more robust. The frames on the

¹The Warren, Yarmouth, Isle of Wight.

²The Brady may be regarded as the Rolls Royce of cabinets. However, whereas the Rolls is still being manufactured, Brady ceased production some 60 years ago. According to an invoice in my possession dated the 1st of June 1909, Brady was a "Shop fitter and Entomological Cabinet Maker", of 368 Lower Fore Street, Edmonton. He appears to have begun making insect cabinets around 1870, and on the back cover of the *Entomologist* for April 1878 was advertising from 3 Bridport Cottages, Silver Street, Edmonton, London, E., mahogany cabinets at 10s per drawer. For sheer perfection of workmanship, the Brady cabinet has never been equalled, nor indeed is it ever likely to be — J.M.C.-H.

drawers were very much wider, often to conceal a continuous camphor cell which ran right round the drawer. The door was generally about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick and the whole cabinet very thick. While Brady cabinets were mostly of 20 drawers each, in one tier, Gurney made cabinets of 40, 20, 12 and ten drawers but the smaller ones were rarer.

Before the 1914 war thin sheets of virgin cork were used, pieces being jig-sawed together and then sanded down. Both Brady and Gurney used this method and like Bradys, the Gurney cabinets were all of solid mahogany, even the bases of the drawers.

During and just after that war, cork became difficult and for a time odd makers (not the above) used cork lineoleum as a substitute. This was of course not as good. It can be distinguished by two features. The drawer feels very heavy, and when you withdraw a pin there is a very slight 'click' and a jerk as the pin is gripped by the lino (and off comes the body!).

Immediately after the war came Crockett. He introduced plywood for the bases of the drawers. He made sound and useful cabinets often in deal, sometimes with mahogany sides and doors and often using the rail principle to support the drawers instead of the concealed runners. This means the drawers looked deeper as there had to be a flange in front to conceal the rails on the insides of the cabinets. Towards the end of his career, Crockett did produce a few cabinets in mahogany. Unlike the two first makers, the drawers of Crockett's cabinets were not as well fitting and not always interchangeable with each other.

In the period between wars Watkins & Doncaster dominated the cabinet scene, the maker being Kendrew who, at his best produced cabinets almost as fine as any. The last one he made in the top bracket was purchased by the late John Spedan Lewis, and I think is still in his country house and preserved there.

W. & D. produced a very wide variety of cabinets, from deal with a dark varnish (which scratched easily) for the schoolboy trade, to the finest mahogany cabinets. At this time they could take advantage of two items, composition cork and mahogany plywood.

The joints of the sides of the drawers of the best of Kendrew's and all those made by Brady and Gurney were dove-tailed.

Hills, father and son, introduced a new and very good system for cabinets. They produced a cabinet with a loose base and top and a unit of ten drawers so that you could stack 10, 20 or 30 drawers in a single tier. The units had a shutter to close them although later some were made with hinged doors. The reason for the shutter was that the cabinets were designed to be built into a continuous bank. They were made in oak or mahogany facings with, generally, whitewood sides to the drawers. The drawers had comb corners and a fairly generous tolerance so that they could be quite interchangeable with any unit. On the whole a good idea, but once committed to this

scheme one had to continue, and when prices advanced during and after the war some collectors felt they were trapped!

I once inspected the coleoptera collection formed by the late Nathaniel Lloyd. He had what looked like a huge collection of about twenty cabinets each in two units of ten. He did not like stooping however, and the bottom units were empty without even a pin hole in the drawers, and served to support the upper deck. They went to Manchester I think, and what a windfall for them.

The main manufacturers used a different design for the edging on the tops of their cabinets, so you can sometimes distinguish them by this. But over the years various amateur makers copied styles, possibly to match a cabinet they possessed or even by accident, so that this feature does not always serve as a reliable guide to the maker.

There must have been hundreds of cabinets of all shapes and sizes produced over the years. My own father, in the earlier days, even made about three, using walnut from a tree in the grounds of his father's estate. I once bought a beautiful cabinet, made at Osborne House by the then Queen's (Victoria) carpenter for one of the ground staff. Not only was it of solid mahogany, but the bases of the drawers were made from half inch thick mahogany.

I have even seen a cabinet with two secret drawers, one at the top and one at the bottom. So good was the top one that the owner passed on without knowing what he had. It contained blown larvae with a lot number from a sale. No doubt these were made for specimens on the 'protected list'!

LATE EMERGENCE OF COMMA BUTTERFLY. — Further to the article "Possible Overwintering of Pupae 1977/1978?" (1978, *Ent. Rec.*, 90: 271), I chanced to find a newly emerged Comma (*Polygonia c-album* L.) drying its wings on the morning of October 27th 1978. Had the weather been other than mild, perhaps emergence could have been delayed until the spring. Autumn roosting habits from observations vary greatly, individuals flying up to the underside of high boughs, fluttering deep into bushes as do red admirals, or just resting on the upperside of a leaf. In the latter case, the wings were closed from a basking position, and the insect did not awaken until strong sunlight had eventually reached and fallen upon it for several minutes on the following morning. — A. ARCHER-LOCK, 5 Windsor Villas, Lockyer Street, Plymouth, S. Devon.

RASPBERRY AS A NATURAL PABULUM OF THE HOLLY BLUE. — On July 11th 1979, when picking raspberries in the garden, I found an apparent Hairstreak larva which duly pupated. I concluded it was *C. rubi* as some years ago I found a larva of this species feeding on raspberry. In spite of careful searching no further larvae could be found. Much to my surprise, on 30th July, a male *L. argiolus* emerged from the pupa. Incidentally there is both Holly and Ivy in the garden. — DR. J. V. BANNER, Wykehurst, 41 Varndean Gardens, Brighton, Sussex.